

## **Open Letter from Brazilian museum educators about the effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on national museum education**

After deliberation during a nationally-convened meeting on April 17th and a national research followed by collective debate, the Committee for Education and Cultural Action (CECA BR) of the International Council of Museums - Brazil (ICOM BR) and the Brazilian Museum Educators Network (REM BR) present through this document their reflections on the situation of museum education in Brazil during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Having gathered data, experiences and opinions from professionals of all Brazilian regions and 20 federative units, we share an emergency analysis, as well as suggestions for professionals of museum education and other museum areas, institutions and public power.

We understand that this moment brings us new reflections and presents us with challenges that have only been timidly faced by the public power, the institutions and their professionals. Some of these challenges call into question the very social role of museums and their post-pandemic survival.

Certainly, there have been positive experiences to be absorbed during this period, such as: the increase in cross-sector collaboration; the recognition that education departments are one of the main connections between museums and their audiences; the reflection about the relation between institutions and society; and the possible uses of new tools and media for audiences to approach, participate, interact and feel stimulated to visit in the future.

However, we are worried about recent dismissals of professionals and entire museum education departments, as well as layoffs, project suspensions and transformation or disfigurement of the workload commonly directed at educators of different museums and cultural institutions nationwide. Thus we have conducted a survey on the matter, and the results are alarming.

Having received 213 valid responses from educators, coordinators, managers and interns from 147 institutions, distributed throughout 58 cities of 19 federative units, from the country's 5 regions, we have shockingly found that 24% of the institutions to which the respondents are linked have dismissed these professionals and in 3% of them there have been layoffs and suspension of educational projects. These dismissals and layoffs entail delay or interruption of many professionals' important means of subsistence, in a time when new work possibilities will hardly appear.

The survey has also showed that 74% of respondents affirm to be teleworking, facing difficulties such as: lack of formation to develop digital and/or online activities (37%); lack of access to the institutions' contents (collections, images, archives, documents) (26%); and lack of financing for the production of digital and/or online educational activities (26%), just to cite a few of the most frequent responses.

We have observed that - due to these professionals' precarious conditions and work relations, frequently kept through temporary projects and services with no employment protection - the current financial aid provided by the government will not be an option for them in this moment of crisis and probable unemployment.

However, the economic, political and sanitary crisis originated by the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil reinforces a reality that these professionals have already been facing along their careers.

The debates that have created the principles and guidelines for the National Policy for Museum Education have already highlighted the lack of recognition of the educational role of museums and the devaluation of their educators, both in public and private institutions. These aspects are reinforced by the historical practice of precarious work relations, with weak employment protection, high turnover and professional instability.

Another factor that stems from the precariousness of museum education and its professional relations has been observed during the Pandemic: the demand for execution of digital/online works whose production requires skills that the educators have not fully developed or that involves equipment they cannot access - such as computers, internet connection, programs and applications - as well as content and methodology that are not necessarily pedagogical.

The issue of professional formation, in this sense, presents itself as a problem that strongly affects the area and aggravates with the closing of institutions. This reality is even more dramatic when it comes to institutions that are small or located far from big urban centers, in which frequently the educational work is developed by professionals that do not have the adequate qualifications or orientation for it, being, many times, a sort of "handyperson".

We believe that, in Brazil, museum education is living an unparalleled moment for developing and consolidating itself as a professional field, and that the current set aggravates a situation already latent before the Pandemic, highlighting the need for professional organization by museum educators and for debate about work relations in the area, as well as about the management models that govern them.

Therefore, we call museum educators from all over the country to strengthen this debate with us, amplifying its reach to other museum professionals, institutions and the public power, in the sense of offering reassurances and rights for museum education professionals during the Covid-19 Pandemic and afterwards.

Following this Open Letter, we present a set of recommendations elaborated in a participatory manner by museum educators and collaborators, directed at the Brazilian museum sector and aiming at the preservation of life, conservation of work and appreciation of Brazilian museum education.

## **CECA BR and REM BR recommendations for the Covid-19 Pandemic moment in Brazil**

As presented by the ICOM (International Council of Museums) document “RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ICOM BRAZIL FACING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK”:

**Considering** the humanitarian crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic across the globe and the governmental decisions to close several institutions;

**Considering** the research carried out by the Brazilian coordination of the Committee for Education and Cultural Action (CECA BR) of the International Council of Museums - Brazil (ICOM BR) and the Brazilian Museum Educators Network (REM BR);

**Recognizing** the impact of this crisis on memory institutions, cultural facilities, museums, archives and libraries;

**Understanding** the need to adopt measures and strategies to ensure the continuity of educational activities and their important role as an institutional dialogue between museums, audiences and society;

**Affirming** the imperative need to protect all professionals working in these institutions, as well as its public;

These recommendations, elaborated in a participatory manner among museum education professionals and organized by CECA BR and REM BR, place the following guidelines to the community:

### **Regarding museum education teams and professionals in cultural institutions:**

- We recommend maintaining teams, without layoffs or dismissals and honoring contract payments, observing all possibilities to ensure the permanence of teams and professionals;
- We recommend the adoption of the home office regime, prioritizing safety and well-being, considering the psychological impact that the current social situation, marked by scarce work possibilities, imposes on workers;
- We recommend maintaining a permanent and open channel of communication and joint decision-making with the museum education teams pertaining to the situation, and particularly to the possibility of long-term structural changes;
- We recommend that institutions provide equipment and resources for collaborators to be able to perform their roles, according to conditions, necessity and to what is stipulated by work

contracts (this indication is in compliance with Art. 75-D of LAW N° 13.467, OF JULY 13th 2017).

- We recommend that institutions consider the permanent structure of educational teams to develop digital/online works, elaborating new activities that may continue in the post-pandemic context.

### **Regarding attributions and possibilities of educational work during the Covid-19 Pandemic:**

- We recommend making use of the situation that imposes itself, as an opportunity for institutions to reflect on their educational policy as a whole, its role, objectives, goals, among other aspects;

- We recommend institutional reassessment of metrics and goals expected for 2020, especially regarding audiences, considering the impact of the Pandemic in educational actions even after the resumption of on-site activities;

- We recommend that institutions, with the support of museum education professionals, engage in solidarity campaigns with their target audiences and immediate surroundings;

- We recommend maintaining or initiating planning, registration and evaluation activities of actions that are already instituted, such as filling in reports, carrying out research and elaborating educational resources;

- We recommend registering and documenting all activities carried out during home office, in order to compose museological institutional documentation of this period;

- We recommend developing activities in accordance with the qualification and capacity of professionals, avoiding work overload and job function irregularities - especially in the case of smaller institutions, with no multidisciplinary teams;

- We recommend elaborating activities with institutional identity, developed collaboratively with other teams, such as Press Office, Visual Programs, Collection, Research, Social Communication, among others;

- We recommend initializing or increasing activities that communicate with audiences via social media and various digital platforms, exploring dialogic practices;

- We recommend elaborating a gradual resumption plan for activities with audiences, especially in-person, along with the start of the situation's normalization.

**Regarding professional qualification activities:**

- During the home office period, we recommend encouraging professionals to improve their qualification for online activities, both for audience interaction purposes and for the team's development, using online/digital platforms and tools;
- We recommend that, on a short-term basis, institutions support the formation and qualification of their teams, so they can handle the virtual language and promote quality content;
- We recommend elaborating a gradual resumption plan for the qualification activities, especially in-person, along with the start of the situation's normalization.

**Regarding cross-sector collaboration and partnerships:**

- We recommend seeking partnerships and collaborative activities between cultural institutions, universities, public power and civil society, with both educational and institutional purposes;
- We recommend incentives for the participation of museum education workers in the area's professional networks, on local, regional and national levels, aiming at the exchange of knowledge and the joint development of strategies for overcoming this moment.

April 30th 2020.  
CECA BR and REM BR